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ABSTRACT

Teachers who restrict their teaching of writing to elements of exposition are likely to fail because there is insufficient content, interest, or challenge in learning simple exposition, and the techniques that contribute to polished exposition are more easily accessible when approached through aesthetic writing. A teaching sequence for using aesthetic writing to teach exposition might include developing student interest, discussing examples, exploring the concept in artistic writing, and then applying the concept in exposition. Possible concepts from aesthetic writing that can be applied to exposition include (1) using narration to support a generalization; (2) using "showing" rather than "telling" techniques; (3) sequencing chronologically; (4) sequencing spatially; (5) sequencing psychologically; (6) developing cohesion and coherence through transitions; (7) using episodic rather than semantic memory; (8) employing metaphors, similes, and analogies; (9) using conversation; (10) developing a point of view; (11) analyzing; and (12) visualizing a concept. (Aesthetic and expository examples of these concepts are included.) (HTH)

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USING CREATIVE WRITING TO TEACH EXPOSITION/ARTISTIC/REPORT WRITING

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USING CREATIVE WRITING TO TEACH EXPOSITION
/ARTISTIC/ /REPORT WRITING/

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Artistic, belletristic, or aesthetic writing--which stresses the careful manipulation of form to achieve simply and directly without waste a preconceived effect--is sometimes slighted in the current curriculum, because now the emphasis is on exposition--which stresses the accurate communication of information with a slight argumentative edge, so that the reader is persuaded to accept that information. Form, other than mechanics and conventional layout, is of little concern.

Nonetheless, the teacher who restricts his or her teaching of writing to "Elements of Exposition" is doomed to failure, for two reasons: 1) there is insufficient content, interest, or challenge--for most students--in mastering simple exposition; 2) the techniques which contribute to polished exposition are more easily accessible when approached through aesthetic writing.

The teaching sequence when using aesthetic writing to teach exposition often follows this pattern:

I. Developing Student Interest
II. Discussing Examples
III. Exploring the Concept in Artistic Writing
IV. Applying the Concept in Exposition

Because motivating students to write and helping them invent both writing situations and writing subjects are always essential for student involvement, the classical idea of INVENTION must permeate all four of the foregoing steps. Before students begin to "Apply the Concept in Exposition," they must have both a reason for writing and a list of possible subjects. If individual students have suggested and selected their personal choices, so much the better.

Here are some possible concepts from aesthetic writing for application in exposition:

1. Using Narration to Support a Generalization

Expository Example:

The Carnegie Foundation has been a long-time friend of English Education. Indeed, when the Committee of Ten published its recommendations for the secondary school way back in 1894, it was Carnegie funds which paid for the volume recommending English as the only subject to be studied by all pupils every year for four years. Not only did the Carnegie Foundation assist, so to speak, at the birthing of our discipline, but over the years it has funded many studies emphasizing English and the English language arts. The strongest support ever has just been issued in the volume High School(1983), written by Ernest Boyer for Carnegie. This report stresses the "Centrality of the English Language" in the American Public School curriculum, emphasizes the connection between good writing and straight thinking, and makes a course in the teaching of writing one of only four required courses for all candidates training to be teachers.

Aesthetic Example:

Dr. Pendergast was absolutely brilliant. No one remembers better than I the time during World War II when the two of us were drafted, sent to Camp Dodge, and exposed to the thousand and one humiliations which the military creatively devised. But all of the humiliations vanished for Pendergast the evening after we took the highly touted Army General Classification Test--a kind of combined I.Q. and Aptitude examination on whose scores the Army loosely based its subsequent assignments. After we had left the massive green wooden building in which we had suffered for two hours, I caught Pendergast's sleeve and asked him nervously, "Well, Doc. How did you do?" "All right, I think," he replied casually, disengaging himself from my grasp. At that instant a huge khaki staff car with two great gold stars signifying a major general sirened up beside us and screeched to a halt. "Which of you is Pendergast?" demanded the spiffy dogrobber driving for the general. "It's I,of course," Pendergast replied wearily. "The general wants to meet you," snapped the dogrobber. "You got the highest score ever recorded on the AGCT." "Of course," Pendergast smiled. And then he turned to me. "I really don't see any point in telling them that at the University, before I was drafted, I wrote the test."

2. Using "Showing" Techniques, Rather Than "Telling" Techniques

Expository Example and Artistic Example

Richard Emmett disliked telephone answering machines very much. It bothered him to have one of them ask him to tell it why he had called.

Richard Emmett dialed the numbers slowly and precisely: 9 6 1 - 6 1 6 7, waiting even longer than necessary after each happy little electronic beep. He was savoring the moment of communion when she would say, "Hello," and he would say, "Hello," and then whisper the winning words he had so carefully memorized, "I've been waiting ever so long to call you...." But suddenly, instead of Valerie's lovely, mellow voice, there was a flat, skinny, electronic parody of her tone declaring, "Valerie is not here just now, but if you will just wait for the sound of the tone and then leave your name, she will---" Emmett flung his telephone into its cradle, slammed his open palm on the desk, wrenched desperately at his collar and necktime with his other hand, and screamed, "I hate you, you electronic monster you!"

Expository Example and Artistic Example

The substation overloaded and blew at 12:32 a.m.

It was a cold, snowy night with high winds sifting the new almost hail-like snow over the crusted two-foot drifts. Most good rural New Yorkers--Upstate New Yorkers, that is--had headed for bed, and with most lights out, the circuits shouldn't have been overloaded. But there was all that activity downstate: the nightclubs, the ball game, the energy-wasting brilliance of Broadway. That--and the failure of Power Plant II--thrust all of the load on the tiny Liverpool substation. It was too much. The cut-off fuse sparked briefly, glowed blue, and then popped. The whole of the northeastern seaboard was in darkness.

3. Sequencing Chronologically

Expository Example:

To prepare any kind of visual presentation, the easiest procedure is to use a "story board," which is the pictorial equivalent of a "shiftable" index card-file system with the added advantage that all of the information cards are visible at the same time. First, one prepares a convenient-sized rack (a two-foot by three-foot piece of plywood is about right). To that, one glues and nails horizontal strips of some kind of grooved molding, about six inches apart. The strips should be mounted with the grooves up so that pictures placed in them and leaned against the board will stay in place. In using the story board, one first brainstorms for separate picture ideas. These can simply be listed first, or each one can be sketched immediately on a different piece of tag board about 3½ x 5 inches. If one lists the ideas first, the nonproductive ones can be discarded without the waste of the time and materials to prepare the individual cards, but some planners prefer to go directly to cards. When the well has run dry on picture ideas, one proceeds to refine the cards as much as his or her own tastes require. For me, a simple sketch is sufficient, but other planners search through magazines to paste up quite accurate representations of the visuals which will eventually be used. Some professionals use a photo archives for the same purpose, and others actually take preliminary photos. Then comes the real use of the story board. The planner shifts and re-arranges and adds and deletes until the final sequence is exactly what he or she desires in the presentation. Then comes the preparation of the final project, whether it is a slide show, a motion picture, a picture layout, a cartoon, or even a collage.

Aesthetic Example:

To prepare his new identity, Marvin went to the Fairview Cemetery on a busy Sunday afternoon when no one would notice his ramblings among the moss-covered headstones and the rounded mounds of grassy turf. Carefully, he copied down the names of infants or children born within a year or two of his own birthday and buried in isolated plots. Next, he went to the Morgue of the Fairview Journal and located the obituaries published within a day or two of the death dates inscribed on each of the grave markers. Two names he discarded immediately: their bearers had received much too much newspaper space, and thus the families must have had some degree of prominence. A third he also discarded when the obit picture revealed that the deceased was of a different race. But the fourth was perfect: from a tiny nearby town, an orphan, a child with no known relatives. Using an alias with a surname similar to that of the child, Marvin wrote immediately to the Clerk's Office of the Court House for the small town, requesting a birth certificate to see if "indeed, he had finally found his long-lost brother's long-lost son." When the birth certificate arrived three days later, Marvin went to the Post Office, applied for a passport based on his new birth certificate, and within ten days received the absolute proof of his new identity.

4. Sequencing Spatially

5. Sequencing Psychologically

6. Handling Transitions, Cohesion, Coherence

7. Using Episodic Memory, Rather than Semantic Memory

Semantic Memory:

Of course, Clarence knew exactly the meaning of customs and import duty. The dictionary was explicit: "Duty is any payment, service, or other render imposed and recoverable by law or custom, esp. one payable to the government." And "Customs are the duties, tolls, or imposts imposed imposed on imports."

Episodic Memory:

Of course, Clarence knew exactly the meaning of customs and import duty. He remembered vividly when the family had returned through Tijuana the preceding summer and the dark, mustachioed customs official in the uniform grand enough for a commanding general had smiled at his mother. "That is very nice perfume, Senora," he had been writing as he spoke. "And you have a very large bottle. You must pay the United States government $24.00 for the privilege of bringing that in from Mexico." "But I bought that in Tampa at Maas Brothers," Clarence's mother had protested. "I didn't buy it in Mexico. The importer had already paid the duty." "I am sorry," the customs man shook his head. "There is no evidence on the bottle that customs has been paid. You are entering the country from Mexico. You have a dutiable item. You must pay the customs office."

8. Employing Metaphors and Similes and Analogies

Expository Example:

To consider the way children learn a concept, consider two analogies. Think first of a train emerging from a tunnel. If it's an old steam train, the first thing you see is the cowcatcher--and you see it in all of its munificent detail--the steel rods, the triangular support, the welded joints, the slight rust spots, and so on. And similarly, as each portion of the engine emerges, you see each item clearly in resplendent detail: And then the tender and then each box car and then the caboose. Now think of another analogy--a photographic sheet, after exposure to the negative, going through the washing process. As it sits in the tray, at first, nothing is visible. Then slowly, a faint general outline of the entire train from cowcatcher to caboose gradually emerges--all at the same time--but with no details apparent. You wait a bit longer, and then slowly, slowly, the details begin to emerge. If you wait long enough, and the bath is right, when you remove the print, every detail is clear and bright and completely visible. Which way do children learn?

Aesthetic Example:

The president was a great, glowing, vacuous comet with a huge, noisy, empty, brilliant train following everywhere he went. He swooped weekly into the dormitories with his train behind him. He traversed great expanses of empty campus, dallying and twirling around because of the gravitational pull of an isolated student. He plunged through the galaxies of the business and academic affairs offices, momentarily pulling some foreign bodies into his wake, but ultimately causing no lasting effect. And week after week, he pursued the same empty orbit.

9. Using Conversation

Expository Example:

"I can understand the on-off, yes-no, stop-go binary system of the computer," said Jill, "but I don't understand how that translates into the ability to print letters and numbers, set margins, provide headings, and all of those kinds of things."

"Of course, you can, Jill," explained Jack, "but you don't have to understand them in detail. You see, each computer has an 'operating system' that has been programmed into it. When you press one key--such as the A--or a combination of keys, such as the Control Key--period--which sets margins on this computer, the 'operating system' automatically controls a whole bunch of the simple on-off, yes-no switches so that they put an A on the CRT (the cathode ray tube) or they set its margins."

"All right, then," Jill nodded, "I'll just depend on the 'operating system' to be sure that the CRT does what I tell it through the keyboard to do---but how on earth do the same yes-no, on-off signals that the operating system has set up for the CRT work on the printer?"

"As a matter-of-fact, Jill," Jack laughed, "they don't. After you have displayed on the CRT (the cathode ray tube) exactly what you want the printer to print, you then give the operating system a command to "write" your material on a buffer--that's a memory storage area. Then you give the operating system another command to "Format" the material for the printer. In short, the operating system has lots of procedures programmed into it to make things easy for you. And it's the operating system once more that organizes all of those on-off, yes-no switches so that they make the printer do what you tell it to."

10. Using Physical Point of View

To understand the Wankel engine, let change our sizes and become about an inch and a half high. Then let's climb into one of the three chambers on the inside of the engine. Now, in an ordinary piston engine, we'd be in one of the four, six, or eight cylinders, and they would be pretty nearly in perfect cylindrical shape, with a piston traveling up and down inside of them. This chamber we're in is pretty irregular, isn't it. It's roughly triangular, but that wall on the left is part of a huge eccentric rotor. In short, it's a rotating chunk of metal that's ex (off) centric (center)--off-center so that this chamber becomes larger or smaller, depending on where the rotor is. Now let's have the operator move that operator around and see what happens. Oh, oh, here it comes. Back up, quickly, or we'll be crushed. Now, hear that whistling sound? As the rotor makes this room smaller, it pushes air out of those ports. Now it's come--that rotor has--as close to us as it's going to get, and it's started to move away so that this chamber is becoming larger. Hear the whistling sound from these other ports, or valves? Now as the rotor moves away, it sucks a mixture of gasoline and air in from the carburetor. And now the rotor is coming around and back at us again. Notice how the valves are closed so the gasoline mixture can't get out. Consequently, the pressure is building up--my ears are really beginning to pop. Now, I think we'd better climb out of here, because when the rotor makes the chamber its smallest and the pressure is at its highest, that spark plug on the outside wall there behind you is going to fire. It will explode the gasoline mixture, and the force will push the rotor around even faster. We'd better not be here when that happens.

11. Using Analysis

Artistic Example:

Petunia knew that she loved Romney, but until she sat that day in the canoe facing him, she didn't know the source and composition of her feelings. Part of them came, she knew, from his own physical presence--his tall, brooding, commanding dominance. She was aware of his six foot two frame, his broad, muscular torso, his slender hips, and his gentle hands, but it was the brown eyes and the gentle, firm smile most of all. Another part came from the similarity of their background and values. Oh, yes, they fit the pattern, and it was inevitable that people of their class, in close proximity, with the same school and club and church and travel experiences should come quickly together. Yet a third part came from Romney's similarity to the other masculine figures in Petunia's universe: her patriarchal grandfather with the scars from his battles still showing in his patrician face; her father, much like a more mature Romney--the same size and shape and presence. But there was another force--perhaps comprising twenty percent of the whole--whose origin Petunia couldn't identify. And it was this twenty percent that motivated her entire, whole-soul commitment, that made her completely sure.

Expository Example:

No one knows exactly where the curriculum comes from. Undoubtedly, a large portion comes from the ancient academic, college-preparatory tradition, but another large proportion comes from the "education for all Americans" movement that recognized the enlarged nature of the school system during World War I and provided for the non-college-bound students. Yet another large section of the curriculum emerges from the "Depression Experience" of the Threadbare Thirties when the schools decided to try to build a new social order. It's for this reason that the curriculum contains studies of minority groups, of comparative economic systems, of political practicalities, and so on. Though it's been almost forty years since the end of World War II, the patriotic stress of that time is still visible in the curriculum, and likewise it shows the effects of the semantic movement of the 1950's, the reaction to Sputnik, the influence of Johnson's Great Society, and even the anti-establishment meanderings of the late sixties and early seventies. Still represented in excessive proportion are the skills and drills and tests from the minimum competencies movements, and now there is the influence of the new, revitalized "Nation at Risk" recognition.

12. Visualizing a Concept

If you can imagine a hill within sight of a deep hole--perhaps an abandoned quarry--you will have some conception of the relationship between the College of Education (the hole) and the University Administration (the hill). The hill is, of course, closer to God and to the powers that be in the State Department, in the legislature, and in the state treasury. The hole, on the other hand, is far down so that only unpleasant things are dropped on it from above, while such desirable droppings as funds, travel, recognition, and acceptance come to a skidding halt, not further than halfway down the hill.